



ROLE OF MUNRO IN RESTORATING THE RYOTWARI SYSTEM IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY, 1798 – 1827

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Abstract *Acquiring maximum revenue was the major intention of British administrators. In this land revenue gave more income to them. The victory of Mysore and Maratha wars removed the hurdles of British in managing the revenue affairs of South India. Before that they had partial control over the territories. During that period they simply followed the previous land revenue settlements for an instance Village Lease System. The formation of Madras Presidency, the growth of revenue administration and the introduction of ryotwari system and the contribution of Munro in restoring the system in Madras Presidency are examined in this paper.*

Keywords

- 1. The paper deals with the land revenue settlements especially the Ryotwari system in Madras Presidency.*
- 2. The period of research covered when Read appointed by Lord Cornwallis as the in charge of Baramahal and Salem, it ends up to the death of Governor Munro. However the importance of the paper begins from 1814 to 1818 during these years Munro restored the ryotwari system in several places of Madras Presidency.*
- 3. Due to absence of landlords and administrative difficulties the British government unable to implement one settlement for the whole Presidency for an instance zamindari or permanent settlement.*
- 4. In ryotwari areas the peasants directly paid their revenue to the government. In this there are no intermediaries between them and the government even though the system was not affordable to the peasants to pay their revenue.*
- 5. The study is based on Tamil Nadu Archival material and relevant secondary sources.*

1. Introduction From the last decade of the eighteenth century onwards there were great discussions among the British authorities in implementing the land revenue systems in the acquired districts. Initially they simply followed the early rulers' methods because the British had partial control over the territories probably up to the end of the fourth Mysore war and the Maratha wars. Those days Zamindari, Rytowari, and Village lease settlements were largely practiced in several parts of Bengal, Bombay and Madras Presidencies. In the latter



Presidency Capt. Alexander Read implemented Ryotwari system in Baramahal on 1792. Thomas Munro was an assistant of Read later defended the ryotwarisystem in Madras Presidency up to his governorship. This paper deals the role of Munro in restoring the ryotwari system in Madras Presidency.

Nilmani Mukherjee's *The Ryotwari System in Madras, 1792-1827* (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1962) gives a detailed account about the ryotwari system in Madras Presidency however the restoration of ryotwari system after the Third Anglo-Maratha War is not strongly dealt and the author gave more importance to economic and social history rather than personalities such as Munro. Other works *History of Land Revenue Settlement and Abolition of Intermediary Tenures in Tamil Nadu*, N.S. Natarajan, *Compendium on Board of Revenue*. B.H. Baden Powell, *The Land Systems of British India: A Manual of the Land Tenures and of the Systems of Land Revenue Administration Prevalent in the Several Provinces. Vol. III, Book. IV, The Raiyatwari and Allied Systems* are also not given much importance to the contribution of Munro in restoring the Ryotwari system.

2. Evolution of Madras Presidency Madras was obtained in the year 1640, by a Grant from one of the descendants of the Vijayanagar rulers,¹ while the Chengalpattu district (also called as 'Jaghire') was taken over from the Nawab of Arcot in two parts, first in 1750 and later 1763.² The five administrative divisions known as Northern Circars to the Mughal system were Srikakulam, Rajahmundry, Eluru, Mustafanagar, and Murtazanagar. They formed the districts of Vizagapatam, Ganjam, Krishna and Godavari.³ These Circars were ceded to the British⁴ by the Nizam of Hyderabad in 1768.⁵

Lord Cornwallis' war with Tipu ended with the treaty of Srirangapatnam in 1792.⁶ As specified by this treaty, a considerable tract of the country in Baramahal (Salem region), apart from the hill taluk of Hosur, Madurai, Dindigul, Palani and Malabar were in the hands of the British. Baramahal and Dindigul were brought under the jurisdiction of the Company Government in Madras.⁷ Coimbatore came under British after Tipu was defeated in 1799.⁸ In addition, the British added Canara, Coimbatore and Palakkad.⁹

Thanjavur was brought under company management in 1799 A.D. on the alleged grounds of incapacity of the then Maratha Ruler.¹⁰ According to a treaty made with the Nizam of Hyderabad in 1800, the four districts viz., Bellary, Anantapur, Cudappah and a portion of Kurnool districts were also added to the Company's territories.¹¹ On 31st July 1801 all the remaining possessions of the Nawab of Arcot in the Carnatic, comprising the then districts of North Arcot, South Arcot, Madurai, Tiruchirappalli and Tirunelveli including Nellore in Andhra Pradesh were made over to the British. The Nawab could retain the titular dignity and a pension.¹²

By 1876, the Madras Presidency had under its jurisdiction twenty one districts, grouped as below - Northern Circars - Visakhapatnam, Godavari and Krishna; East Central Districts - Nellore, Madras, Chengalpattu and South Arcot; Ceded Districts - North Arcot, Kurnool, Bellary, Cuddapah, Salem, Coimbatore and Nilgiris; Southern Districts - Thanjavur, Tiruchirappalli, Madurai and Tirunelveli; West Coast - South Canara and Malabar.¹³



3. Land Revenue Administration The acquisition of territories by the English carried the burden of administration. The maintenance of law and order, the collection of revenue, and the administration of justice formed the hallmark of a good administration in those days was unknown.¹⁴ Extracting the maximum revenue was the purpose of the British administrators because land tax was the major source of income to the British Government.¹⁵

Initially revenue administration had been conducted by the two departments, the Public Department dealing with all civil matters including political relations with the local powers, and the Military Department being in charge of the revenue administration as well. This mixing up of revenue affairs with the normal working of the Public Department produced administrative difficulties and consequently the conduct of revenue affairs suffered.¹⁶

Provincial Councils were formed in Madras on 1769, after the model of Bengal, to supervise the Revenue arrangements.¹⁷ The Regulating Act of 1773 provided certain powers to the Governor General of Fort William, Calcutta, over the Madras Presidency.¹⁸ The Act imposed on the Court of Directors the legal obligation that all revenue transactions of their servants should be notified to His Majesty's Commissioner of the Treasury. The Presidency was administered the Governor by Council of Fort St. George. The Council had consisting of the Governor, the Commander-in-chief and two Councillors. The Council was called the Board and the Governor was its President.¹⁹

A Committee of Assigned Revenue was setup in 1780 as per a resident (the local administrative officer) was appointed to the acquired districts who worked under the direction of the committee.²⁰ In 1786 the Civil and Military Government of Madras was thoroughly reorganized.²¹ The Committee of Assigned Revenue was dissolved when the Board of Revenue was set up at Madras in 1786.²² The Board of Revenue, subject to the control of Governor, had to superintend the whole administration, collect revenue and control subordinates. During the establishment of the Board of Revenue the individual collectors were appointed to the Provincial Councils in the Circars.²³

After the acquisition of Baramahal (1792) the Company government in Bengal urged its counterpart in Madras to make a permanent zamindari settlement. But an attempt to do so ended in failure chiefly because of the absence of traditional zamindars.²⁴

Lord Cornwallis discovered that the civil servants possessed no knowledge of the local languages and conducted official business with the aid of dubashes - the native interpreters in the service of the Company. He resolved to employ able military officers who possessed a competent knowledge of the local languages and experience in the management of revenue. Lord Cornwallis appointed Captain Alexander Read, as the in charge of the conquered countries and also called as Ceded Districts in 16th March 1792.²⁵

In 1792 a Commission was appointed to take charge of Baramahal, with Captain Read at its head. The latter was assisted by Mr. Hardis, a civilian in Company administration.²⁶ Without any approval of the head-quarters, Read considered it carefully to implement a temporary revenue settlement with the actual cultivators than with renters. This system was the origin of the later Ryotwari system.²⁷

By 1798 the Commission had completely surveyed the Baramahal and determined the rents which should be paid on the ryotwari system.²⁸ Read established the ryotwari settlement in the districts of Baramahal and gradually extended it to other parts of the province of Madras.²⁹ After a detailed field survey, and assessment of



each field based on its quality, proclamation was made setting forth the terms of the settlement. One of the conditions was that all the resident cultivators of a village should be jointly responsible for the revenue due on all lands cultivated during the year.³⁰ For administrative convenience Read divided the district into three divisions with the headquarters which were Northern - Krishnagiri, Central - Dharmapuri and Southern division - Salem. Graham, Munro and Macleod were responsible for these divisions respectively.³¹

4. Ryotwari System in Canara The Ryotwari System as begun by Alexander Read (in Barahmahal) and perfected by Munro in Canara emerged through trial and error.³² Munro continued his service with unremitting diligence and achieved success up to the spring of 1799.³³ The outbreak of fourth Anglo-Mysore War brought Munro back to the army. In the aftermath of the death of Tipu Sultan in May 1799, Munro was appointed a collector of newly acquired district of Canara. Munro's collectorship of Canara lasted until October 1801. The settlements of the Ceded Districts were undertaken by Munro in 1801.³⁴

Ryotwari Assessment could not be made without an actual survey, and that work was commenced by Thomas Munro, when he assumed the management of the Ceded Districts in 1801.³⁵ Munro informed his subordinates in the Ceded Districts that there were three ways of assessing. (i) To take the known revenue of a 'district' (i.e. a taluk or specified portion of the area) and then distribute it over the villages and ascertain the payment of each person; (2) to take a single village as a whole and distribute it; (3) to take each individual field and add the sums to give the village total. In either case the purpose was to determine each peasant's revenue payment on the lands he held, and to assess cultivable waste at the average of cultivated lands of the same kind in the village.³⁶ Apart from hill and rocks all lands were measured. Fields were registered in the names of the persons who were enjoying it.³⁷ Munro submitted his Report on 26th July 1807.³⁸

5. Restoration of Ryotwari System The prominent aim of Thomas Munro was to break the power of local elites, who were the backbone of the resistance of British power, by removing them from their customary role as middlemen in the revenue collection process.³⁹ In 1813, Thomas Munro, giving evidence before a select committee of the House of Commons had said, "with respect of permanency there is no difference between the two (permanent and ryotwari) systems; but the ryotwari leaves the Government an increasing revenue in proportion to its cultivators".⁴⁰ Moreover Munro said before the House of Commons, "The principle of the Ryotwari System is to fix an assessment upon the whole land of the country; the assessment is permanent; every Ryot who is also a cultivating proprietor of the land which he holds is permitted to hold that land at a fixed assessment as long as he pleases; he holds it forever without any additional assessment".⁴¹

The failure of the permanent settlement leading to the auction of the estates for sale was viewed with alarm by the Court of Directors of the East India Company.⁴² Indeed, the Directors were convinced that the interests of the State as well as the agricultural classes could be secured best only under the ryotwari system.⁴³ Eventually Munro succeeded in convincing the Company government to authorize the ryotwari system.⁴⁴

In 1814 the Court of Directors formulated a definite policy which must be considered as a landmark governing the relations between the Government and the zamindars. They advocated the purchase of estates by the Government whenever they were brought to sale on account of arrears and ordered the introduction of the



ryotwari system in all such estates at the earliest practicable moment. In their Despatch, dated 6th June 1814, they remarked so after referring to the unsatisfactory state of the Vizianagaram estate.⁴⁵

In 1820 Munro became Governor of the Madras Presidency. Under this ryotwari system each peasant as holder of the plot of land for which he paid the revenue to the government received a patta in return, since no other intermediary right in land was recognized between him and the government.⁴⁶ Pattas showing the survey fields, assessments, and remissions allowed, were issued to each peasant.⁴⁷ Over assessment and other harmful effects of the early ryotwari system had been removed.⁴⁸ The Company administration ordered the Permanent Settlement across the Presidency but Munro maintained the Ryotwari in Canara for a short period and in the Ceded districts up to his governorship (1827).⁴⁹

Thomas Munro succeeded in replacing the Cornwallis judiciary by one of his own design during his governorship, from 1820 to 1827.⁵⁰ During this period, in Ganjam, Visakhapatnam, Rajahmundry, Masulipatnam, Guntur, Salem, Chengalpattu, Cuddalore district, and the western, southern, and Chittoor Palayams, the Permanent Zamindari system prevailed; in the Ceded Districts, Nellore, the two divisions of Arcot, Palnad, Tiruchirappalli, Tirunelveli and Thanjavur, the village system was in practice. The ryotwari system was in place in Malabar, Canara, Coimbatore, Madurai, and Dindigul.⁵¹ Munro died as Governor of Madras at Pattikonda in the Kurnul district on 6th July 1827.⁵²

6. Conclusion From soldier to Governor Munro got good experience in handling the Indian affairs especially the revenue administration when he was selected by Alexander Read as his assistant in Baramahal (Central division). After Alexander Read, Munro wanted to implement the ryotwari system. In between the government pressure to implement zamindari system Munro retains ryotwari at the end of his governorship. Due to his formal support, the system survived in southern India.

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